

REVIEWS

KANIA, W. 1992. Safety of catching adult European birds at the nest. Ringers' opinions. *Ring* 14: 5-50.

Terry Oatley (1992) reviewed the precursor to this paper, a study by the same author on his own experiences of desertion of Great Tits *Parus major* broods when the adults were caught at the nest (Kania 1989). This review was initiated by EURING (European Union of Ringing Schemes) to summarize the experiences of European ringers on the influence on breeding success of trapping adults at the nest.

250 ringers of 10 ringing schemes contributed information for 135 European species. The paper goes much further than the title implies, containing not much qualitative folklore (as suggested), but mostly quantitative data, summed across ringers, with calculated proportions of desertions presented along with 95% confidence intervals. For 66 species there were sufficient data to be able to draw useful conclusions about the stage in the nesting period when catching the adults is safest. For example, for the Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* we learn, based on $n = 543$ nests, that it is 'very dangerous' to catch the adults during the laying stage (desertion rate 5-10%), 'moderately dangerous' ($n = 3095$) to catch them in the first half of incubation (desertion rate 2-5%), but 'safe-catching' (desertion rate less than 2%) occurs during hatching (472), and during the early (4281), middle (4282) and late (2390) stages of the nestling period. But for House Sparrows *Passer domesticus*, catching is 'extremely dangerous' (desertion rate exceeds 10%) from the laying stage until the middle of

the nestling period, and is only safe when the nestlings are big.

Although there are exceptions to every rule, Wojciech Kania makes the following general suggestions to reduce the desertion rate:

1. Choose the appropriate catching method for the species. Sometimes catching methods which are quick for the ringer are dangerous for the nest!
2. Do not leave traps set on a nest for "too long". What constitutes "too long" depends on the species, but 30 minutes seems to be a good rule of thumb.
3. Handle the captured adult quickly and with caution. Work out the appropriate distance from the nest to release the bird.
4. Avoid handling birds regularly, and keep repeated nest disturbances to the minimum.
5. It is safer to catch the second adult on another day than to keep the first bird and hope that the other will return quickly to the nest.
6. Avoid catching attempts in cold weather.
7. Choose the appropriate stage in the nesting period. In general, catching becomes progressively safer later in the nesting period, and large young are rarely deserted. On the other hand, large young tend to 'explode' from the nest after disturbance, and the best guideline seems to be to trap

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7. Choose the appropriate stage in the nesting period. In general, catching becomes progressively safer later in the nesting period, and large young are rarely deserted. On the other hand, large young tend to 'explode' from the nest after disturbance, and the best guideline seems to be to trap

adults during the middle third of the nestling period.

8. Some species seem more prone to desertion if caught late in the day.

However, Kania notes that even for relatively common species (in Europe!) the knowledge of what is and what is not safe is inadequate. There is a need for further investigations into the impact of catching adults on their behaviour and breeding success. To meet this need EURING has initiated a project called SCAN (Safety of Catching Adults at the Nest). Ringers record the method of catching and releasing the bird, the time of day, the time taken to catch the bird, the duration of handling, the ambient temperature and weather, the nesting stage, and the outcome (nest deserted or not deserted).

SAFRING ringers whose projects involve the trapping of adults at the nest could follow the same protocol. Once sample sizes reach, say, 30 nests they

could report their results in *Safring News*. For example, Bradley (1993) provided guidelines for the safe catching of Greater Striped Swallows *Hirundo cucullata*. Ringers who make incidental observations on small numbers of nests could submit their data to SAFRING, where it will be curated until pooled sample sizes are adequate for publication.

In many studies of bird behaviour and breeding biology it is essential to catch the owners of a nest. Anyone initiating such a study in southern Africa could profitably study Kania's results for the most closely related European species.

REFERENCES

- BRADLEY, G.H. 1993. Brood affinity by Greater Striped Swallows *Hirundo cucullata* caught at the nest. *Safring News* 22: 3-4.
KANIA, W. 1989. Brood desertion by Great Tits *Parus major* caught at the nest. *Acta Ornithologica* 25: 77-105.
OATLEY, T.B. 1992. Review of Kania (1989). *Safring News* 21: 75-76.

Les Underhill

LARS SVENSSON. 1992. *Identification Guide to European Passerines*. Fourth, revised and enlarged edition. Stockholm: Lars Svensson. 368 pp.

For the ringer in Europe, a copy of 'Svensson' is about as indispensable as ringing pliers. Since the first edition, published in 1970, with revisions in 1975, 1984 and now 1992, Lars Svensson has produced the definitive guide to the identification, ageing and sexing of 229 passerine species a ringer in Europe could conceivably (or inconceivably) encounter. Each edition is an expansion on the previous one, and takes into account the comments and criticisms he has received. The new

edition also deals, for the first time, with the recognition of subspecies.

What is of interest to SAFRING ringers? The two introductory chapters are particularly relevant. The most useful part of the first chapter deals with assorted measurements and how to take them. Do you know the correct procedure for measuring 'wing-span', 'depth of bill', 'width of bill', 'tarsus', 'toe' or 'claw'? Or how to determine the 'wing-formula'? It's all here, with good descriptions, tips on how to take the measurements more easily, and clear line drawings to illustrate the procedures. If ringers develop their own idiosyncratic ways of taking measure-